

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

New claims 32-46 are added. The following is the status of the claims of the above-captioned application, as amended.

1. (Previously presented) A method for producing cheese, said method comprising
 - a) subjecting a mixture of (i) cream and (ii) a whey protein preparation to a homogenization process; wherein said whey protein preparation comprises hydrolyzed whey proteins;
 - b) mixing said homogenized mixture from said a) with a milk to provide a cheese milk; and
 - c) producing cheese from said cheese milk, wherein said cheese has improved meltability compared to cheese made using an unhydrolyzed whey protein preparation.
2. (Original) A method as defined in claim 1, wherein said homogenization process comprises emulsification.
3. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 1, wherein said whey protein preparation is selected from the group consisting of whey protein isolate and whey protein concentrate.
4. (Canceled.)
5. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 4, wherein said whey protein preparation exhibits a degree of hydrolysis (DH) of between about 0.5% and about 20%.
6. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 5, wherein said whey protein preparation exhibits a degree of hydrolysis (DH) of between about 1% and about 10%.
7. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 6, wherein said whey protein preparation exhibits a degree of hydrolysis (DH) of between about 2% and about 8%.
8. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 4, wherein said hydrolyzed whey proteins are prepared by contacting whey proteins with a glu/asp-specific protease.

9. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the mixture is contacted with a protease prior to said homogenization step.
10. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 9, further comprising inactivating said protease prior to said homogenization step.
11. (Previously presented) A cheese product produced using a method as defined in claim 1.
12. (Previously presented) The method as defined in claim 1, wherein said homogenized mixture comprises a whey protein:fat ratio of at least about 2% by weight.
13. (Previously presented) The method as defined in claim 1, wherein said homogenized mixture comprises a whey protein:fat ratio of at least about 4% by weight.
14. (Previously presented) The method as defined in claim 1, wherein said homogenized mixture comprises a whey protein:fat ratio of at least about 8% by weight.
15. (Previously presented) The method as defined in claim 1, wherein said homogenized mixture comprises a whey protein:fat ratio of at least about 12% by weight.
16. (Previously presented) A method for producing cheese, said method comprising:
- (i) providing a mixture comprising (a) cream and (b) a whey protein preparation; wherein said whey protein preparation comprises hydrolyzed whey proteins;
 - (ii) subjecting the mixture to a homogenization process; and
 - (iii) incorporating the homogenized mixture produced in (ii) into cheese wherein said cheese has improved meltability compared to cheese made using an unhydrolyzed whey protein preparation.
17. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein said homogenization process comprises emulsification.

18. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein said whey protein preparation is selected from the group consisting of whey protein isolate and whey protein concentrate.

20. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 19, wherein said hydrolyzed whey proteins are prepared by contacting whey proteins with a glu/asp-specific protease.

21. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein the mixture of step (i) contributes more than about 5% of the total fat in the cheese.

22. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 21, wherein the mixture of step (i) contributes more than about 20% of the total fat in the cheese.

23. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 22, wherein the mixture of step (i) contributes more than about 40% of the total fat in the cheese.

24. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein the mixture of step (i) is contacted with a protease prior to step (ii).

25. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 25, wherein the protease is inactivated prior to step (ii) or step (iii).

26. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein the mixture of step (i) further comprises a phospholipase.

27. (Canceled.)

28. (Previously presented) A method as defined in claim 16, wherein said cheese is selected from the group consisting of ripened and unripened cheese.

29. (Original.) A method as defined in claim 28, wherein said ripened cheese is cheddar and said unripened cheese is mozzarella or cream cheese.

31. (Previously presented) A cheese product produced by a method as defined in claim 16.

32. (New.) The method of claim 1, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 0.1-5% w/w protease:whey protein.

33. (New.) The method of claim 1, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 0.5-1%. w/w protease:whey protein.

34. (New.) The method of claim 1, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 0.1-500 mAU/g whey protein.

35. (New.) The method of claim 1, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 1-50 mAU/g whey protein.

36. (New.) The method of claim 1, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 10-25 mAU/g whey protein

37. (New.) The method of claim 16, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 0.1-5% w/w protease:whey protein.

38. (New.) The method of claim 16, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 0.5-1%. w/w protease:whey protein.

39. (New.) The method of claim 16, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 0.1-500 mAU/g whey protein

40. (New.) The method of claim 16, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 1-50 mAU/g whey protein

41. (New.) The method of claim 16, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 10-25 mAU/g whey protein

42. (New) A method for producing cheese, said method comprising

a) preparing a hydrolyzed whey protein preparation by treating whey proteins with a protease in an amount about 0.1-5% w/w protease:whey protein;

b) subjecting a mixture of (i) cream and (ii) the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation to a homogenization process;

c) mixing said homogenized mixture from said a) with a milk to provide a cheese milk; and

d) producing cheese from said cheese milk, wherein said cheese has improved meltability compared to cheese made using an unhydrolyzed whey protein preparation.

43. (New.) The method of claim 42 wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 0.5-1%. w/w protease:whey protein.

44. (New) A method for producing cheese, said method comprising

a) preparing a hydrolyzed whey protein preparation by treating whey proteins with a protease in an amount about 0.1-500 mAU/g whey protein;

b) subjecting a mixture of (i) cream and (ii) the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation to a homogenization process;

c) mixing said homogenized mixture from said a) with a milk to provide a cheese milk; and

d) producing cheese from said cheese milk, wherein said cheese has improved meltability compared to cheese made using an unhydrolyzed whey protein preparation.

45. (New.) The method of claim 44, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 1-50 mAU/g whey protein.

46. (New.) The method of claim 44, wherein the hydrolyzed whey protein preparation was prepared by treating the whey proteins with a protease in a ratio of between about 10-25 mAU/g whey protein